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Classic Project



In this plan you'll find:

- Step-by-step construction instruction.
- A complete bill of materials.
- Construction drawings and related photos.
- Tips to help you complete the project and become a better woodworker.

Scroll-sawn Nativity Scene



WEEKEND WOODSHOP EASY-TO-MAKE GIFTS, TOYS & ACCESSORIES

Scroll-sawn Nativity Scene

If you like scroll saw work and enjoy giving gifts, then this Nativity Scene—often called a crèche—is one project that's sure to satisfy. Designed by master woodworker Gunther Keil (see About the Builder sidebar), the Nativity Scene is one of his most successful concepts. All the pieces pack neatly into the stable, making the scene easy to store once the holiday season has passed.

As shown, we've provided full-size patterns for all the parts. The animals and figures are all cut from 3/8 in. thick stock, the crib is cut from a 1 in. square by 1 1/8 in. long block, baby Jesus is carved from a 1/2 in. length of 1/8 in. diameter dowel stock, the stable is cut from a 1 1/2 in. thick by 2 1/8 in. wide by 4 1/2 in. long block, the stable bottom and back are cut from 1/2 in. thick stock, while the sliding lid, the finger pull, the decorative star and the crib ends are all cut from 1/8 in. thick material. Gunther uses a variety of woods—mainly cherry, maple, walnut, oak and pine for the figures and animals, walnut for the crib and cherry for the stable—but almost any combinations of woods will be fine. If you're making several Nativity Scenes, try varying the combinations. The exotics and decorative woods,

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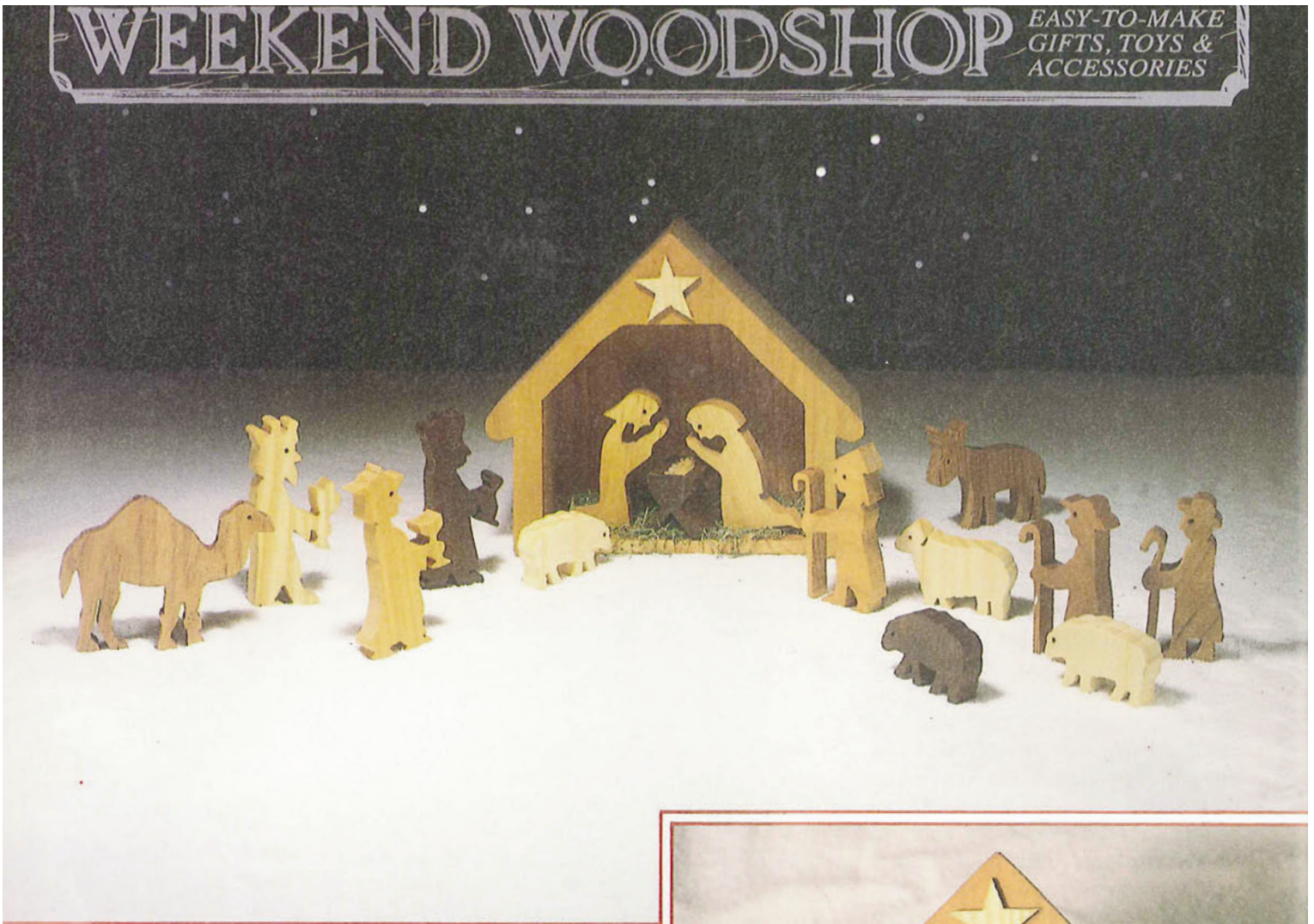
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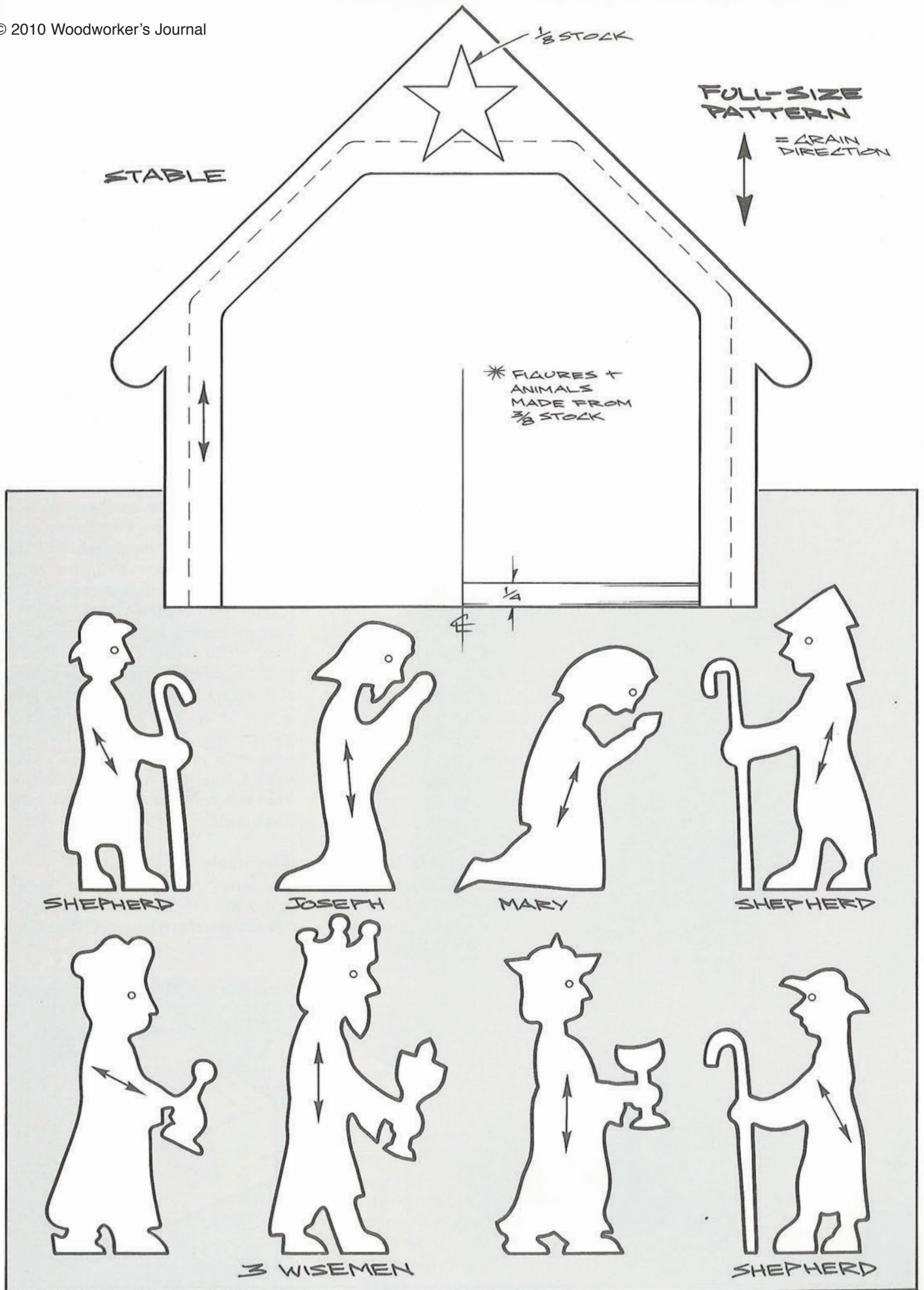


Scroll-sawn Nativity Scene

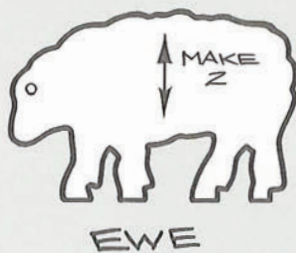
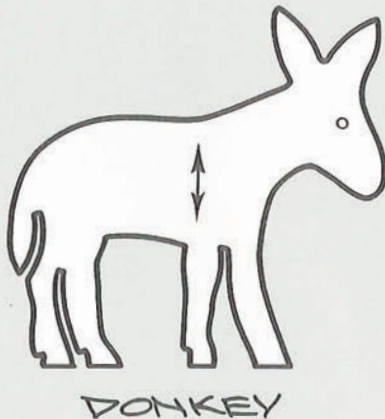
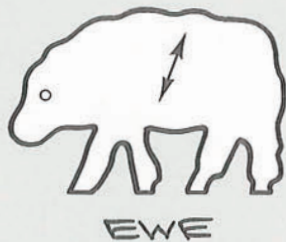
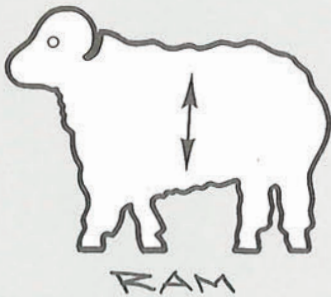
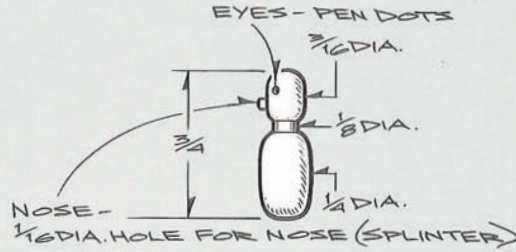
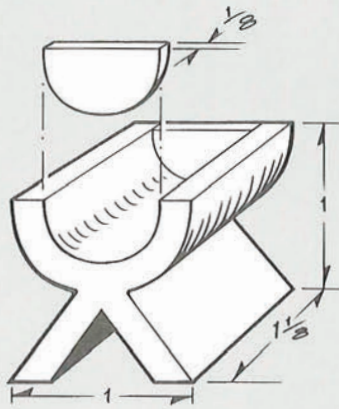
If you like scroll saw work and enjoy giving gifts, then this Nativity Scene—often called a crèche—is one project that’s sure to satisfy. Designed by master woodworker Gunther Keil (see About the Builder sidebar), the Nativity Scene is one of his most successful concepts. All the pieces pack neatly into the stable, making the scene easy to store once the holiday season has passed.

As shown, we’ve provided full-size patterns for all the parts. The animals and figures are all cut from $\frac{3}{8}$ in. thick stock, the crib is cut from a 1 in. square by $1\frac{1}{8}$ in. long block, baby Jesus is carved from a $\frac{3}{4}$ in. length of $\frac{1}{4}$ in. diameter dowel stock, the stable is cut from a $1\frac{7}{8}$ in. thick by $5\frac{5}{8}$ in. wide by $4\frac{3}{4}$ in. long block, the stable bottom and back are cut from $\frac{1}{4}$ in. thick stock, while the sliding lid, the finger pull, the decorative star and the crib ends are all cut from $\frac{1}{8}$ in. thick material. Gunther uses a variety of woods—mainly cherry, maple, walnut, oak and pine for the figures and animals, walnut for the crib and cherry for the stable—but almost any combinations of woods will be fine. If you’re making several Nativity Scenes, try varying the combinations. The exotics and decorative woods,





CRIB AND BABY JESUS



like curly or bird's-eye maple, are good choices. You may even want to make a few sets with painted animals, figures and stable.

This is one project that will make you feel justified for all those precious scraps squirreled away over the years; even the stable can likely be gleaned from a plank end or cutoff. If you don't have a piece that's at least 1 7/8 in. thick for the stable, then laminate a few scraps to obtain the required thickness.

The Figures and Animals

As you'll note from the photo of the Nativity Scene, the figures shown are the three wise men (each a separate pattern), three shepherds (each a separate pattern), plus Mary and Joseph (two separate patterns). The animals shown are three ewes (two from the same pattern, the third different), one ram, one donkey and one camel. You may want to make more shepherds or animals, but keep in mind that if you make more than the number shown in the photo, you'll probably have trouble fitting the extras into the stable when it comes time to pack the Nativity Scene away.

There's really not much involved in making the figures and animals. Photocopy the page, paste the patterns onto your stock, then cut them out. Or, trace the patterns onto the stock, using carbon paper between the magazine page and the board. Take note of the grain direction shown on the various patterns, and try to locate the patterns on your stock so that the grain direction is as indicated. This will help avoid cross-grain weakness that would be a problem if the patterns were laid out differently. Once the figures and animals are cut out, use a 1/16 in. diameter drill bit to

establish the eye holes, then lightly sand.

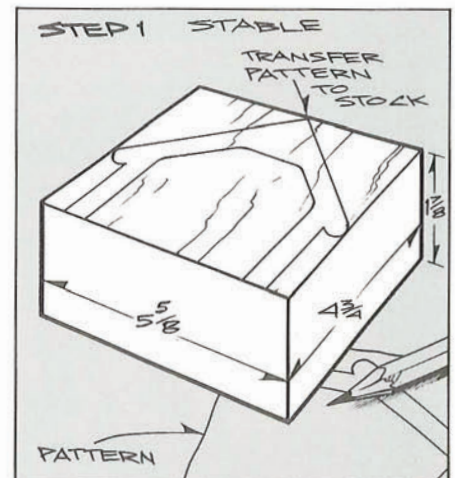
The Crib and Baby Jesus

Transfer the full-size pattern for the crib to your 1 in. thick by 1 in. wide by 1 1/8 in. long block. There's little danger in working small pieces on the scroll saw, but if you feel more comfortable, you could cut the crib from a wider block. The crib ends are cut to fit from 1/8 in. thick stock, and then glued in place.

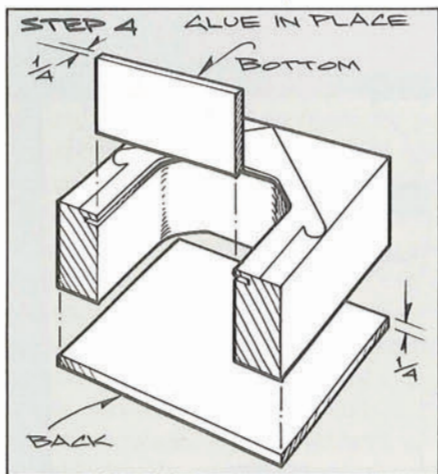
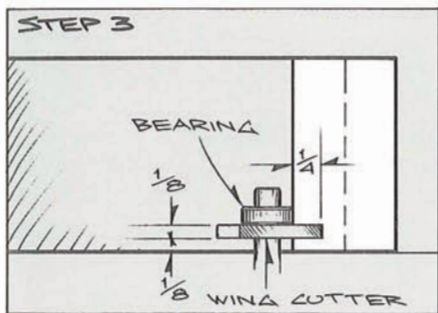
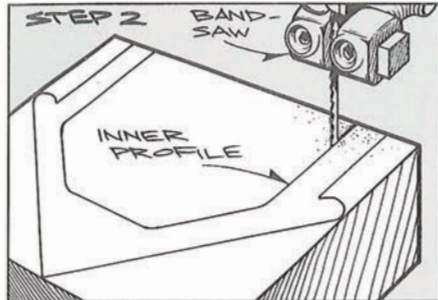
Baby Jesus is carved from the 1/4 in. diameter dowel. Just round the dowel ends, narrow the neck area to indicate a head and body, then add a pair of dots with a pen for the eyes, and finally drill a hole in the face center and glue a splinter into it for the nose. Then lay baby Jesus in a bed of sawdust in the crib. A little glue in the bottom of the crib will hold the sawdust and baby Jesus in place.

The Stable

Our simple 6-step illustration shows how to make the stable. First, lay out the full-size pattern on your stock, as shown

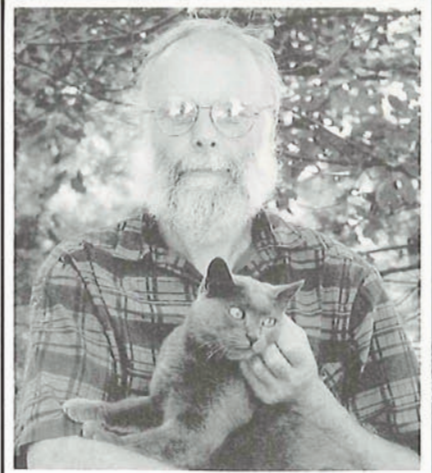
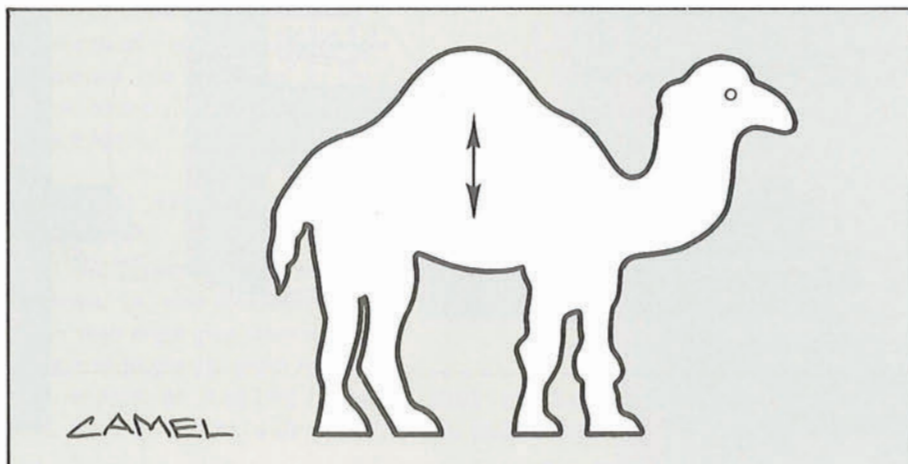
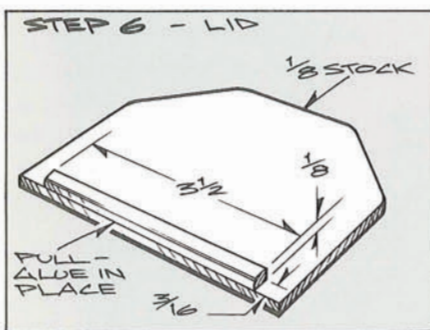
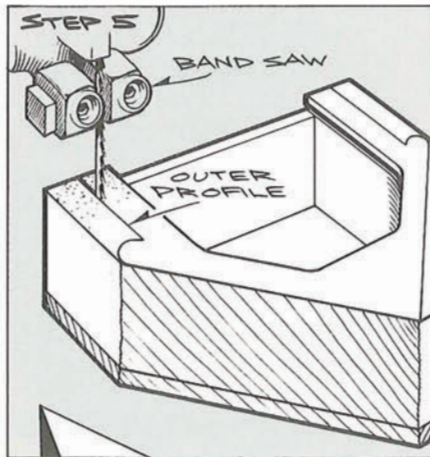


in Step 1. Next, cut the inside profile (Step 2). Now, using the router equipped with a wing cutter that makes a $\frac{1}{4}$ in. deep by $\frac{1}{8}$ in. wide groove, establish the groove for the sliding lid (Step 3). Glue the back and bottom in place (Step 4), cut the outside profile of the stable (Step 5), final sand, then make the lid (Step 6). Cut and glue the decorative star in place.



Finishing Up

Gunther uses only an oil finish on his crèche, which brings out the natural beauty and grain of the wood. When setting up the Nativity Scene, be creative. Some sprigs of dried grass, straw or moss and maybe a few small stones will help to create a pleasant scene. You could even take a piece of cardboard, paint a starry night sky on it, and place it behind the crèche for added ambiance. Although it should go without saying, the Nativity Scene is not a toy, and so should be kept well away from infants or little ones, whose well documented curiosity could be a hazard given the many small parts.



About the Builder

Gunther Keil immigrated to the U.S. from Berlin, Germany, as a professor of German Literature, and today lives with his family "on 55 acres in Trumansburg, on the west side of Cayuga Lake in central New York, where I raise sheep, bees, and utilize the trees that grow on my land."

Gunther tells us "my designs are known in both the Old and New World. They are in the permanent collection of the Toy Museum in Nuremberg, Germany, and in the Hartsville Museum in Hartsville, New York. They are also displayed at the "Toys For All Ages" show at the Smithsonian and in the American Crafts Museum. Gunther's work has been published in *Fine Woodworking Design Books* and in *The Woodworker's Journal*, and is sold in craft stores, galleries and catalogs throughout the United States and Canada.

About his work, Gunther explains, "I have always worked with animal shapes, homo sapiens included. I prefer to use the natural colors of wood to match natural forms, but occasionally add wood dyes for color or accent. Recently, I have developed a concept of habitats, which portray animals in their regional environments. All my work, especially the miniature habitats and my ark, express the fragility and exquisiteness of life, which is too easily forgotten in our technical world."

We'll be bringing you more of Gunther's excellent work in future issues.



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